

FEAR: SOCIAL MEMORY AND (NON-)NARRATIVE RESISTANCE

Responding to the theoretical impetus provided by the affective turn (Ticinese Clough and Halley 2007; Hogget and Thompson 2012) on the one hand, and to the specific ethnological, folkloristic and anthropological challenges in the contemporary local and global life on the other, the authors of the articles in this thematic section all conducted their research within the project “Narrating Fear: From Old Records to a New Orality” (2017 – 2021) financed by the Croatian Science Foundation. The aim of the project is to explore the feeling of fear in its permanent and variable guises as an archetypal and modern, individual and social condition, from the perspective of different social sciences and humanities disciplines. The main idea behind the project is that fear is one of the central symptoms of contemporaneity, and that becoming aware of fear as well as narrating, describing and understanding fear can help in bringing about constructive change of individual and social consciousness.

In Anglo-American literature, the rise of theoretical reflection on the “culture of fear” (Furedi 2002), largely from a political science and sociological point of view, came after the World Trade Center attack, occasionally reviving as a result of political events which aroused concern and anxiety, such the American presidential election in 2016 (Nussbaum 2018). In contrast, in this part of Europe, it was an entire decade earlier that the fall of communism and the disintegration of Yugoslavia renewed the traumas of the “short century” (Hobsbawm 1994), reintroducing violence and fear of the other onto the political stage. This happened following a short period when it seemed that the rationality of the Enlightenment project (in its manifestations on both sides of the Iron Curtain) could indeed cause “a man’s teeth to stop aching”, as Krleža reputedly ironically quipped about socialism. Croatian ethnology was among the first scholarly endeavors to have noted the new state of fear in the early 1990s (Čale Feldman, Prica and Senjković 1993).

When defining the scope of the “Narrating Fear” project, the project members were aware that the list of contemporary fears was vast, but still implicitly believed that it was more-or-less finite. They could not anticipate that before the end of the first project period, when the preparation of this theme section was in its final stages, yet another global item would be added to the list – fear of the new coronavirus pandemic. When the pandemic was in full swing, it seemed that the world became a single affective community imbued with fear, with its abatement it is becoming increasingly clear that fears were once again

distributed unfairly among people, enduring for a shorter or longer period long after the state of emergency caused by the pandemic. As noted by Renata Jambrešić Kirin at the very end of her fieldwork in Western Slavonia, the pandemic led her interlocutors to compare it with the war of the 1990s (based on their personal experience) and with the earlier wars (based on generational affective heritage). What the pandemic, the war and some other sources of fear really have in common will undoubtedly be the subject of many ethnological, folkloristic and anthropological studies.

The first two articles in this theme section are devoted to the affective atmosphere in the Croatian regions of Western Slavonia and Lika afflicted by the war and transitional plight, which Jelena Marković defines as “a space of collective anxiety”. Engaging in participatory ethnography, with a folkloristic sensibility for (non)verbal genres, with an awareness of the emotive and political involvement of the researcher, and grounded in the theory of affects and memory studies, Jambrešić Kirin and Marković bring to light out-of-sight pathways of expressing fear. They find them outside the scope of commemorative ritual practices, media intimidation, political and vernacular hate speech, and outside the scope of narration, elaboration, and even testimonies – in the ultimate form of non-narrative practices, which Jelena Marković’s research focuses on. Her paper features a series of remarkable conversation snippets which show that communication may be realized by silence.

The remaining two articles deal with the way in which contemporary art depicts and undermines universal human fears. Suzana Marjanić deals with the fear of pregnancy as both archetypal and modern, primordial and constructed as well as personal and social, as seen in the artistic visions that resist it. The analyzed works of art show that challenging use of the motif of pregnancy may act as a vaccine to develop immunity against being intimidated, particularly by those designated by society as those who should be fearful, like women. Una Bauer deals with tragedy as the oldest artistic and theoretical treatment of the feeling of fear, but within the context of postdramatic theater. In postdramatic theater the tragic does away with the narrative and the dramatic, as well as its long-lasting groundedness in human destinies and stories, and is manifested through the material, sensory and visual, making the encounter of the viewer with their own horror even more fearsome.

Pivotal to the thematic section is the idea of alternative modes of narrating fear as well as overcoming and resisting fear. Overcoming and resisting fear are central to all the articles in this section, even when – in the regional contemporary setting, the global condition or in art – they seem to primarily identify anxiety and depression.

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